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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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March 12, 2008

The Honorable Henry A. Waxman
Chairman
Oversight and Government Reform Committee
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Waxman:

We write to convey our profound concerns over the Committee's inaction with regard to an urgent oversight matter: the 2010 Decennial Census.

Evidence of serious problems with the census has been accumulating for some time, but efforts to get these issues on the Committee's agenda have been politely, but effectively, rebuffed. In December of last year, questions were raised during a Census Subcommittee hearing about the Field Data Collection Automation (FDCA) project, and other new technology approaches, undertaken by the Commerce Department's Census Bureau to improve reach and accuracy of the address canvass and non-response follow-up. Testimony at that time acknowledged serious problems with those efforts, but concluded the challenges were manageable within the census schedule. On January 7, the Ranking Members of the full committee and the relevant subcommittee wrote to inform you of information strongly suggesting the problems at the Census Bureau were far more dire than portrayed and that earlier testimony regarding those issues may have been incomplete, inaccurate, or misleading.

Those are matters that would normally trigger an aggressive investigation by the Committee. Instead, valuable time was lost on inconclusive staff briefings that did not confront obvious emerging issues. The problems have now become so significant that the Secretary of Commerce has become personally involved. We know he has briefed key Members of Congress and has formed a special task force to gauge the true extent of the trouble and evaluate possible fixes. It is our understanding that the Commerce Department and the Census Bureau are already discussing various contingency plans to get the 2010 Decennial Census back on track. We believe it imperative the Committee be an integral part of those discussions. Continued inaction by this Committee could end up costing taxpayers billions of dollars and risks a flawed or even failed census.

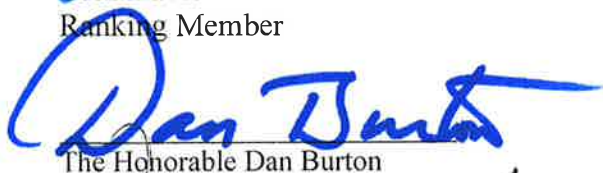
Although the Senate recently held an oversight hearing, the House has a unique and vital interest in the count upon which congressional district apportionment will be based. Mandated by Article I of the Constitution, the Decennial Census is a key building block of our representational democracy. It should not be left on auto-pilot to drift or crash. Time is running out. Critical preparatory steps have already been delayed. The Commerce Department will soon confront key, irreversible decisions about how to proceed. Clearly, we need to know more about how the census process is being managed.

This Committee has explicit oversight and legislative responsibility over the Census Bureau and its programs. While perhaps not as politically charged or prosecutorial as some of our recent investigations and hearings, census oversight should now be an urgent priority and we request you undertake appropriate investigative steps and schedule public testimony on these matters as soon as possible.

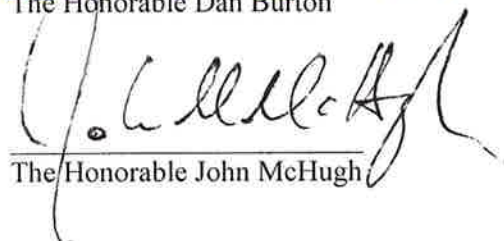
Sincerely,



Tom Davis
Ranking Member



The Honorable Dan Burton



The Honorable John McHugh



The Honorable Mark Souder



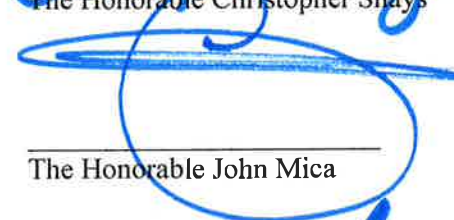
The Honorable Chris Cannon



The Honorable Michael Turner



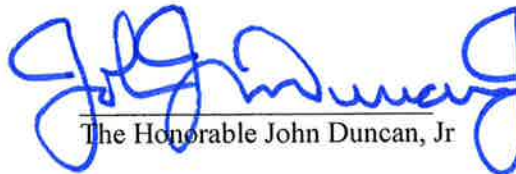
The Honorable Christopher Shays



The Honorable John Mica



The Honorable Todd Platts



The Honorable John Duncan, Jr



The Honorable Darrell Issa

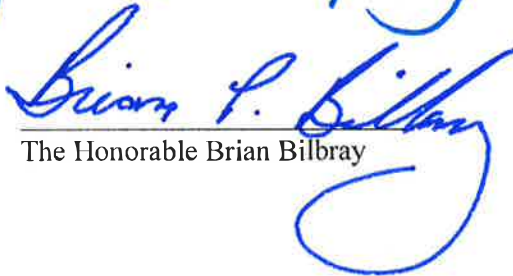
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The Honorable Kenny Marchant


The Honorable Patrick McHenry


The Honorable Brian Bilbray


The Honorable Lynn Westmoreland


The Honorable Virginia Foxx


The Honorable Bill Sali


The Honorable Jim Jordan